

Agassiz Memorial
TEACHERS' AND PUPILS' FUND

"THE PRAYER OF AGASSIZ"

A POEM

By JOHN G. WHITTIER

AND

"AGASSIZ"

A SONNET

By T. W. PARSONS



CAMBRIDGE
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1874

MR. WHITTIER has kindly placed his poem, "The Prayer of Agassiz," at the disposal of the Agassiz Memorial Committee, for the furtherance of their object. The scene which it describes will not be soon forgotten by those who witnessed it. His sympathetic reply to the request for its use is given below.

AMESBURY, 30 3 mo., 1874.

Agreeably to thy request, I send a copy of my poem on Agassiz. It is most fitting that the Teachers of our country should take a prominent part in the testimonial to their beloved master. I am sure they will all esteem it a privilege to thus manifest their love and reverence.

I am very truly thy friend,

JOHN G. WHITTIER.

THE PRAYER OF AGASSIZ.

ON the isle of Penikese,
Ringed about by sapphire seas,
Fanned by breezes salt and cool,
Stood the Master with his school.
Over sails that not in vain,
Wooded the west wind's steady strain,
Line of coast that low and far
Stretched its undulating bar,
Wings aslant along the rim
Of the waves they stooped to skim,
Rock and isle and glistening bay,
Fell the beautiful white day.

Said the Master to the youth :
" We have come in search of truth,
Trying with uncertain key
Door by door of mystery ;
We are reaching, through His laws,
To the garment-hem of Cause,
Him, the endless, unbegun,
The Unnamable, the One,
Light of all our light the Source,
Life of life, and Force of force.
As with fingers of the blind
We are groping here to find
What the hieroglyphics mean
Of the Unseen in the seen,
What the Thought which underlies
Nature's masking and disguise,
What it is that hides beneath
Blight and bloom and birth and death,
By past efforts unavailing,
Doubt and error, loss and failing,
Of our weakness made aware,
On the threshold of our task
Let us light and guidance ask,
Let us pause in silent prayer ! "

Then the Master in his place
Bowed his head a little space,
And the leaves by soft airs stirred,
Lapse of wave and cry of bird
Left the solemn hush unbroken
Of that wordless prayer unspoken,

While its wish, on earth unsaid,
Rose to heaven interpreted.
As, in life's best hours, we hear
By the spirit's finer ear
His low voice within us, thus
The All-Father heareth us ;
And his holy ear we pain
With our noisy words and vain.
Not for Him our violence
Storming at the gates of sense,
His the primal language, his
The eternal silences !

Even the careless heart was moved,
And the doubting gave assent,
With a gesture reverent,
To the Master well-beloved,
As thin mists are glorified
By the light they cannot hide,
All who gazed upon him saw,
Through its veil of tender awe,
How his face was still uplit
By the old sweet look of it,
Hopeful, trustful, full of cheer,
And the love that casts out fear.
Who the secret may declare
Of that brief, unuttered prayer?
Did the shade before him come
Of th' inevitable doom,
Of the end of earth so near,
And Eternity's new year?

In the lap of sheltering seas
Rests the isle of Penikese ;
But the lord of the domain
Comes not to his own again ;
Where the eyes that follow fail,
On a vaster sea his sail
Drifts beyond our beck and hail ;
Other lips within its bound
Shall the laws of life expound ;
Other eyes from rock and shell
Read the world's old riddles well ;
But when breezes light and bland
Blow from Summer's blossomed land,
When the air is glad with wings
And the blithe song-sparrow sings,
Many an eye with his still face
Shall the living ones displace,
Many an ear the word shall seek
He alone could fitly speak.
And one name for evermore
Shall be uttered o'er and o'er
By the waves that kiss the shore,
By the curlew's whistle sent
Down the cool, sea-scented air ;
In all voices known to her
Nature own her worshiper,
Half in triumph, half lament.
Thither Love shall tearful turn,
Friendship pause uncovered there,
And the wisest reverence learn
From the Master's silent prayer.

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AGASSIZ.

WHAT made the greatness of our great man gone?
Facts about fishes?—reading laws that rule
The glacier's march and move the black moraine?
An eye whose gaze with equal reverence glowed
At a small star-fish, or his Alpine throne?
Or that he founded for our land a school?—
Never to see that harvest which he sowed!—
His large companionship with man, shell, stone,
And every type of the most High? The fool
Who thinketh in his heart there is no God
Stands here in silence. 'Mid our tears and pain
This joy was uppermost: beneath His rod
Bowing, we bless Him for each nobler mind
Whose highest vision science fails to blind.

DECEMBER, 1873.

